

A Debate Between The Sword And The Pen

by Zayn al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn al-Wirdī d. 749 Hijrī

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In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The sword and the pen are instruments of action and speech. They are the support of nations; any nation bereaved of them will lack in strength. They are the pillars of authority that declare who shall be lowered and who shall be raised [in status], and at the forefront of the dispute that arises from them are what is implied and what has been stated. Thus, I thought about which of them is more worthy of pride and status, so I convened a court gathering to judge between them, wherein I portrayed them as being present for the litigation, granted them an equal footing of honour, and vocalized their inner state.

The pen said:

It shall move its course and set down anchor all in the Name of Allāh. By the day as it shows up [the sun's] brightness, and by the night as it conceals the sun. To proceed; All Praises are due to Allāh Alone, Who created the pen, Who honoured it with an oath, Who created it before all else, Who beautified the paper with its branch, just as He beautified branches with leaves. May prayers be on the one who said, *"The pens have dried,"* for the pen has gained mastery, and he who writes with seven pens is from the class of the book in the seven heavens. Fate and predestination have run their course, and have replaced the tongue in its commandments and forbiddances. How many more thrusts and jabs has it made than the blacks and the whites; it has fought those afar and sliced those anear enough to fill its eyelids – what matches the pen in how the people obey it, and how it walks to them ahead of all the rest?

So the sword said:

In the Name of Allāh Who lowers and raises, **"and We have sent down iron wherein is mighty power and benefits."**¹ To proceed; All praise is to Allāh Who revealed the verse of the sword, by which He increased esteem for the wound, and secured the fear over lands. And may prayers be on the one who used the sword to implement what is written on the pages and who was served by the pens judging against the leaders, and on his family and Companions whose swords were sharpened and their edges

¹ al-Hadīd, verse 25

were made by slicing the enemies. The sword has great power and strong authority, it wipes the lines of eloquence, and stands to face that cannot be faced; he who resorts to anything else to subdue the enemy will be tired away - and how not, when it's edge defines the limit between seriousness and play?!

If the pen is a witness, then the sword is a judge; and if the pen approaches for disputation in a matter, the sword will break it with a swift motion. With it the religion came to light, and it is the means for suppressing the proud. The hand of our Prophet carried it to the exclusion of the pen, by which it was clearly honoured among the nations. Paradise is under its shade - especially when it is unsheathed so you see the torrents of blood flowing through it.

The sky of its sheath is ornamented by the stars, and he spoke the truth who said, "The sword brings more truthful news than others." The carrier does not abuse it, nor does he handle it with the tips of his fingers like the pen. It is not like a pen that resembles a people who are disrobed of their garments, then turned on their heads as is said; rather, it is as though the sword was created from flowing water, or bright star, well-balanced. It is a precious gem that it cannot be bought for a paltry price, like the pen. It does not suffer as does the pen from blackness and obliteration. How much can it tell of traces of a reality, or the reality of a trace? In the sheathe of the people, the sword is the measure of a war, and thus it was fashioned in a form ready for war.

So the pen said:

Or it is that which is brought up in adornments, and in dispute cannot make itself clear? He is boasting while he is positioned to the left, and I am seated to the right?! I am the one concerned with the intellect, and you are concerned with the echoes - you are a tool of death! You only become soft after entering the flames, and you are only sharpened for a great sin. You are useful for an hour of time, while I spend my life in obedience. You are used for causing fear, and I am used for creating desire. If your vision is one of iron, then my vision is one of golden water. Where does your tradition rank from my efforts, and where does the impurity of your blood rank from the purity of my ink?

The sword said:

Do the likes of you reproach the likes of me for blood?! As long as I am able command my nestlings the knives, I am like the witches when they blow in the knots, O poor one. Your corpse has been removed from life, your nose has been split and your tongue broken. Woe to you! If you are used for composing poetry collections then you are a grieved teller, or for composition then you are the servant of a master, or for information then you are a censured sorcerer, or for the jurist then you are deficient in knowledge, or for the poet then you are a deprived beggar, or for the witness then you are a poisoned coward, or for the teacher then for the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting. As for me, I have a shining face, decoration, jewels, and awe when I am unsheathed. I ascend the pulpit, and I am possessed with authority, but you are like a hermit. I traverse the path and break the ties.

So the pen said:

Me, I am the son of the water from the sky, the companion of the creek, the ally of the air! But you, you are the son of the fire and smoke, the scatterer of years, the traitor of brothers! You separate that which should not be separated, and you break that which Allāh commanded to join. Indeed, the sword put on contemptuous airs, thickened its neck, and was given boiling water to drink that tore up its guts. O raven of disunion, O tool of death, O sick-eyed one, O two-faced one, how many have you annihilated and executed? And how many have you widowed and orphaned?

The sword said:

O son of mud! Are you not skinny when you are in mud?! How many times have you flowed the opposite way, and behaved in a diminishing manner, counterfeited and distorted, undefined and defined, written lines of satire and insult, and immortalized shames and slander?! Rejoice at your excessive splendour and the strength of your fear. If you measure the whiteness of my pages against the blackness of yours, then soften your speech for your life is for but a short time. Beautify your response for I have its force, and lessen your harshness, and turn your attention away from the blood in my face to the ugliness in yours. If not, then the softest

strike from me shall uproot you and extract your origins, to irrigate whoever was absent from your woods, and as a pasture for the one who would slice your skin if they called you.

So when the pen saw the sword getting angry, he softened his speech to him and said:

Manners are learnt from me, and gentleness is taken from me. If you become soft, I become soft, and if you act well, then I act well. We are people of hearing and obedience, and thus a group of us gather together in the same inkwell. As for you, you are people of violence and disunity, thus two swords are never gathered together in the same sheathe.

The sword said:

Is this a trick under the guise of virtue? For a matter that has not cut off one in disdain! If you are – as you claim to be – one of manners, then you would not meet the head of a writer with the knot of sin. I am the one with the louder voice, and my edge is my tongue delivers the peculiarities of death. I am of fire, free of smoke, and the pen is of sounding clay like pottery. If the pen claims he is like me, I will command he who beats his head on my shoes.

So the pen said:

Speak not, for the possessor of a sword who has no wellbeing, is as he who is weaponless.

The sword said:

Be silent, for the pen of the eloquent without its portion is like a empty spindle.

So the pen said:

I am purer and more chaste.

The sword said:

I am more dazzling and radiant.

So the owner of the pen recited to his pen:

(إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ)

Verily, We have granted you al-Kawthar^[2]

The owner of the sword recited to his sword:

(فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحَرْ)

Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice^[3]

So the owner of the pen recited to his pen:

(إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ)

For he who makes you angry will be cut off.^[4]

It said:

But by my inscribed book, and my frequented house, and by the Torah and the Injil, and the exalted Qur'ān, if you do not cease your violence with me, and make distant your proximity to me, I will write you among the deaf and dumb, and I will inscribe this ruling upon you with my pen.

The sword said:

By my firm back, my clear opening, my two moist tongues, and my two solid faces, if you do not keep your blackness away from my whiteness, I will rub your face in your ink! You have acquired your signature of insight and firmness from the lions in the jungle, and although I have not neglected to advise you, shall we pay no attention to your mention?

² al-Kawthar, verse 1

³ al-Kawthar, verse 2

⁴ al-Kawthar, verse 3

So the pen said:

Surrender! If you are higher then I am more knowledgeable, and if you are more beautiful then I am more clement, and if you are stronger then I am more straight, or if you are more crooked then I am more to blame, or if you are softer then I am more delightful, or if you are more expensive then I am more prevalent, or if you are more powerful then I am more admonishing, or if you are lethal, then I am sharper.

The sword said:

How can I not surpass you, when the such-and-such dwelling is supporting me?

So the pen said:

How can I not surpass you, when He (may His help be glorified) has taken charge of my affairs?

The judge between the sword and pen said:

When I saw the diligent arguments from both sides, with their opposing proofs, and when I knew that each of them had some truth to the nobility of their status and a supporting narration from the hadith literature, I eased the situation and scrutinized the evidences, until I returned the pen to its cover and sheathed the sword. I did not give preference to one, and remained silent on which I felt was more correct, until each is judged for their deeds, their extreme anger is calmed, and the situation grants its own insight.

Abū Jandal al-Azdī said:

After this wonderful, exciting debate I pondered the annals of Islamic history and found that whoever raises the pen without the sword becomes lowly, and whoever who raises the sword without the pen goes astray and makes mistakes, but the one who raises them both together will be guided and reach his destination. My Allāh have mercy on Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah for he said, *“The religion will only be established by a guiding book and a helping sword, and your Lord suffices for you as a Guide and Helper.”*

Allāh is the Greatest, and glory is for Allāh and Islām.

Allāh, grant victory to the believing Mujāhidīn everywhere

O Allāh, protect our Mujāhidīn brothers who are being pursued everywhere.

O Allāh, free our prisoners and the prisoners of the Muslims everywhere

O Allāh, destroy America, the Crusaders, the Jews, and the Arab and non-Arab tyrants everywhere.

Abū Jandal al-Azdī

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